

The Advantages of UNITY considered. N^o 13

I N A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the
Antient and Honourable SOCIETY
O F
FREE and ACCEPTED
M A S O N S,

I N T H E
Parish-Church of St. JOHN BAPTIST,
I N T H E
CITY of BRISTOL,

On *Monday*, the 28th of *December*, 1747.

By *JOHN PRICE*, M. A. K

Publiſh'd at the Request of the SOCIETY.

*Quid dulcius, quam habere, quocum omnia audeas ſic loqui,
ut tecum?* TULL. de Amicitia.

B R I S T O L :

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PSALM CXXXIII.---I.

*Behold ! how good, and how pleasant it
is for Brethren to dwell together in
UNITY,*



WHAT is implied in these Words, is a Society of Men mutually concurring to serve one another, and the good Effects flowing from such a Concurrence. Men, considered as social Creatures, derive their Happiness from each other : And, indeed, it is upon this View that they enter into Societies ; for every Man is designed by Providence to act for the Good of others, as he tenders his own Advantage ; and, by that Means, to secure their good Offices, by being serviceable to them.

IN discoursing further upon the Words, I shall,

I. SHEW what it is that supports the Unity of a Society.

II. THE Influence, under which the Unity of this present Society hath been preserved.

III. THE Advantages of such an Unity, or that it is good and pleasant to be thus united.

I. I AM to shew what it is that supports the Unity of a Society.

THE Foundation of Society, or the End for which it was first instituted, is, as I observed before, the several Benefits arising from it: But this is so obvious to every one, that I need not take further Pains to prove it. But then, as to its Support, it must be allowed,

lowed, “ That Society, by its own
 “ Power, cannot provide for the Ob-
 “ servance of but few moral Duties,
 “ and of those few but imperfectly ;
 “ because it hath not a Sanction of
 “ Rewards, and Punishments, to se-
 “ cure Obedience to its Laws.

“ To supply this Defect, some o-
 “ ther Power must be added, that
 “ hath Influence on the Mind of Man,
 “ to keep Society from Confusion. But
 “ there is no other than the Power of
 “ Religion : Which, teaching an over-
 “ ruling Providence, the Rewarder of
 “ good Men, and the Punisher of ill,
 “ can oblige to the Duties of imper-
 “ fect Obligation, which human Laws
 “ overlook ; and teaching also, that
 “ this Providence is omniscient, that
 “ it sees the most secret Actions, and
 “ Intentions of Men, and hath given
 “ Laws for the perfecting their Na-
 “ ture, will oblige to those Duties of
 “ perfect Obligation, which Human
 “ Laws

“Laws cannot reach, or sufficiently enforce.”*

WERE it not for a Sense of GOD and his Providence, Men wou'd soon throw off all Obedience to human Institutions, and, consequently, make Incroachments, one upon another, and do what else the worst of Savages do. This is evident from several Instances of this Kind amongst the uncivilized *Indians*.

RELIGION, therefore, is not only a proper, but a necessary Support to Society, because it obliges Men to those Duties which are the *Cement* of it. And,

II. THIS is the Influence, under which the *Unity* of this present Society hath been preserved: For every Mem-

* See Mr. Warburton's Alliance between Church and State, Sect. 3. Page 17.

ber *here* is particularly enjoined to obey the Moral Law*; and, if he rightly understands his Profession, he can neither be an *Atheist*, nor a *Libertine*. But tho', in Times of old, the Fraternity were obliged to embrace the Religion of the Country where they resided; yet it is now thought to be of greater Use and Expedience to oblige them only to that Religion in which all Men agree, a Belief of God and his Providence; a God, who, by virtue of his Justice, will reward, and punish Men according to their Behaviour.

So that, tho' there is Leave given for the Enjoyment of particular Opinions, and no Injunction to determine in favour of any one Mode of Worship, more than another; yet, *here*, is the strictest Obligation upon all to be GOOD MEN, and TRUE, Men of Ho-

* See the BOOK of CONSTITUTIONS.

nour and Honesty, however distinguished by different Opinions in Religion. Upon which Account, MASONRY is become the *Center* of Union, and the Means of conciliating Friendship among Persons, that must, otherwise, have remained at perpetual Distance.

UPON this religious Principle (the Belief of GOD and his Providence) are founded those other Virtues, which adorn this Institution.

I. I SHALL mention LOVE. This is a Virtue immediately resulting from the Duty we owe to GOD; for *he that loveth GOD, will love his Brother also.*

THE Members of this Society are enjoin'd, not only to be affectionate, but do all the Service they can to each other; because Love must terminate in Action, and stand the Test of Experience, before it can pass for current: For what St. *James* said of Faith may, with

with equal Propriety, be said of this Virtue, *It is dead, being alone.*

ADD to this, that we are as several Streams flowing from one Fountain, as Branches sprung from the same Stock. Whatever, therefore, is the Concern of one, is the Care of all : For every one is indispensably obliged not only to be compassionate and benevolent, but to administer that Relief and Comfort, which the Condition of any Member requires, and he can bestow without manifest Inconvenience to himself. No politick Dissimulation of Affection will be allowed of amongst those, who are upon the *Level*. Nor can Persons, who live within the *Square*, act otherwise, than consistently with that Golden Rule, of *doing, as they would be done by*. For every one here is another Self ; and he, that hates another, must necessarily abhor himself also : He that prejudices another, injures his own Nature ; and he, that doth not

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relieve

relieve a distressed Brother, starves a Member of his own Body. For *the merciful Man, saith Solomon, doeth Good to his own Soul ; but he that is cruel, troubleth his own Flesh.*

BUT farther : 'Tis not only a Man's Indigence hath a Claim to a Share of the general Benefaction, or a Title to a Man's private Bounty : It is every Member's Duty to promote the secular Interests of his Brother ; and in Affairs of Trade and Commerce to have a principal Respect to those, who are of the same Household.

INDEED as Men, and especially as Christians, our Benevolence shou'd be universal, shewing no Respect of Persons. But then, as Brothers, if any Distinction can be made without Prejudice to other Men, we ought to be as favourable, and beneficent, as may be, to those of our own Society.

THAT

THAT this Doctrine may not appear inconsistent with Religion, I must observe that it is a Rule, not only allowed of, and practised by all Men; but seems to be justified by our Saviour's own Example.

WITH respect to the future Happiness of Men, his Love was extended equally for the Benefit of every one; for the *Gentile*, as well as the *Jew*: But yet he gave more distinguishing Marks of his Affection for St. *John*, than any other Apostle.

HOWEVER, if this Conduct of our Saviour does not sufficiently vindicate this Distinction, yet certainly it cannot be a Breach of Charity to observe it. For tho' we are commanded to do *Good unto all*, yet we are, at the same Time, obliged more *especially* to have a Regard to *them that are of the Household of Faith*.

2. BUT to proceed to the other Virtues which support this Society--- and not to mention the Duty of Justice, or that every one is under Obligations punctually to observe Agreements; impartially to decide Disputes, and injure no Man in his Estate or Reputation; I will add another useful Quality---a generous Behaviour in our mutual Intercourse: By which I mean, that no rigorous Points of Right are to be insisted upon, and no Man take Advantage of another. It is always thought better to extenuate our Claims, and lessen the Strictness of our Pretences; for this will induce Men to think well of us, and engage their Esteem. Whereas different Measures discover in us but little Kindness, and equally as little Regard for the Welfare of another.

3. To the Virtue of Generosity we may subjoin that Respect and Courtesy, which the Station of some Men demands

demands of us, and which others, upon the Score of Humanity, expect from us,

A RESPECTFUL and affable De-meanour naturally begets the Esteem of the Great and Eminent, and the Good-Will of the Mean and Low. For which Reason, a skilful Deportment hath been distinguished amongst the Social Virtues.

UNDER the Terms of Respect and Courtesy is usually comprehended Civil Language, which certainly is very becoming in every Man, but is more particularly their Duty, who are under additional Obligations to those of Reason and Religion, *to speak Evil of no Man, but to be gentle, shewing all Meekness unto all Men.*

CONTUMELIOUS Words are always destructive of *Harmony*, and often terminate in a settled Hatred. Upon which

which Account, if any Disputes shou'd arise, (as they are, sometimes, unavoidable) This Society has prescribed Rules for managing them without Satire or Reflection upon Men's Persons, and Methods of convincing without Reproach or Virulence. When it is necessary to reprove a Man for ill Behaviour, it is enjoined by this Constitution as equally necessary and expedient, that it be done with Civility and Tenderneſs: For no Wound, by being roughly handled, will, upon that Account, the more easily be healed; nor will Errors in Opinion be ſooner removed by Insolence, or ill Manners corrected by Severities.

4. ANOTHER engaging Virtue to continue the preſent Unity, is, Humility. To admire our own Endowments is apt to make us depreciate thoſe of others; and to covet Reſpect will as naturally provoke Men to object againſt us, as it will diſpoſe ourſelves

*selves to contend for Pre-eminence ;
for he that is proud of Heart stirreth
up Strife, and only from Pride cometh
Contention.*

To make our own Judgment of Things a Rule to govern other Men, is an Act of Usurpation, equally as unbecoming, as it is unwarrantable ; the readiest Method to break the Peace, and disturb the Order, of Society. Whereas to converse like Brethren, is to be modest in esteeming our own Abilities ; as complacent to others, as we desire they should be to us ; as liberal, in giving them Leave to dissent from us, as we are to ourselves, in enjoying our own Sentiments.

5. NOR is it less useful to the Tranquility and Happiness of this Society, that Censures are forbidden. Men's Actions are to be treated with Candour, and to be accounted for in the best Manner that may be. We are to
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construe Expressions, that bear a double Meaning, in the most favourable Sense they will admit; and not rashly condemn any Man's Practice, but examine the Reasons, which possibly may acquit him. To excuse his Faults by such Circumstances, as may serve that Purpose, and not aggravate them by groundless Conjectures, or unfair Consequences. For this is the only Conduct that shews a Disposition of living amicably, and is the most likely of any, to secure every Man's good Will. To connive at Foibles, and not to resent Affronts, are sure Means of preventing Trouble, and of preserving Unity and Concord. It is an Indication of Prudence, and an honourable Addition to a Man's Character; for *the Discretion of a Man deferreth his Anger, and it is his Glory to pass over a Transgression.*

6. As a Consequence of this, there are Injunctions which relate to publick
Autho-

Authority; that, tho' the Actions of Superiours shou'd be notoriously blameable, yet still it is our Province not to complain; because that only tends to lessen the Reputation, and cool the Affection due to Government: Therefore we deem it necessary, as well as prudent, to abstain from such an unwarrantable Practice, and discreetly submit to such an Event of Things, as *He* shall bring to pass, who is the only competent Judge, and sovereign Disposer of all Things; who hath the Hearts of Kings in his Hands, *and fashioneth them as he thinks proper.* Hence it is easy to infer, that every Member of this Society who acts consistently with his Profession, will be subject to the higher Powers, and therefore cannot be concerned in any Conspiracies against the Peace and Welfare of a Nation, nor behave himself undutifully to inferiour Magistrates. For as this Society hath been always injured by War, Bloodshed, and Confusion;

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so the Kings of old have ever encouraged it, on account of its Peaceableness and Loyalty: Because there are interwoven in its very Constitution particular Restrictions from all State-Disputes; so that if any Member should rebel against the Government, he will not be countenanced in his rebellious Principles, tho' he may be pitied as an unhappy Man.

THUS have I enumerated the several Virtues that have supported, and adorned this Society: And, upon a proper Review of them, I can see nothing that Morality or Religion condemns. For since a suitable Esteem for Religion is, and hath been, always held necessary, it follows, that Prophaneness, and foolish Jestings have been proportionably discouraged and punished. All the other Virtues, which are founded upon this religious Principle, are useful to every Man; upon
which

which Account, it is to be presumed, they will not be censured.

THEREFORE, as to any Objections that have been raised against the Society, they are as ridiculous as they are groundless. For what can discover greater Folly in any Man, than to attempt to vilify what he knows nothing of. At that Rate, he may with equal Justice, vilify, or calumniate any thing else that he is not acquainted with.

WITH respect to some peculiar Customs amongst us---They cannot, with any Shew of Reason, be liable to Censure; for every Society hath Peculiarities of one Kind, or another, which are not to be revealed to Men of different Communities.

BUT as to the Objections which have been occasioned by the ill Behaviour of some of the Fraternity; they are so far from being of Weight with

a Man of Ingenuity and Candour, that he will think them equally as absurd as the former. For if the Unworthiness of any Man is a Reflection upon his Profession, it may be affirmed, with Parity of Reason, that the Misconduct of a Christian is an Argument against Christianity. But this is a Conclusion, which, I presume, no Man will allow ; and yet it is no more than what he must subscribe to, who is so unreasonable, as to insist upon the other.

THUS it appears, that this Society does not in any wise deserve those Reflections, that have been so liberally, and yet so foolishly, thrown upon it.

AGAIN, if the Antiquity of any Society is a Recommendation to it, it might be proved, if it were necessary, that this bears as early a Date, as any Institution in Being. But that will neither be pertinent to my Subject, nor of
any

any Service to my Audience. I shall therefore proceed,

III. To shew the Advantages of such an Unity; or, according to the Text, *how good and pleasant it is for Brethren to dwell together in UNITY.*

AND if the Virtues I have mentioned have any Tendency to make Life itself pleasant and agreeable, which, I believe, no Man will deny, it will follow, that the Advantages of such an Unity, as is supported by them, are very considerable. For where the Regulations of a Society are calculated not only for preventing of Enmity, Wrath and Dissension, but for promoting of Love, Peace, and Friendship; there Conversation must be attended with mutual Confidence, Freedom, and Complacency. He, who neither contrives Mischief against others, nor suspects any against himself, has his Mind always calm, and his Affections

fections composed. All the human Faculties rejoice in *Order, Harmony,* and *Proportion* ; by which this Society subsists ; and upon which depend its *Wisdom, Strength,* and *Beauty.*

How engaging then is that Conversation which is established upon such Principles, supported by such Regulations, and calculated for such Ends !

THE Prospect, it must be confessed, is delightful, where the Objects correspond in graceful Symmetry : But the Scene is much more inviting, where the Members of a Society not only refrain from Prejudices, but cheerfully condescend to equal Terms ; not only keep close to the Rules of Justice, but abate from rigorous Demands ; appease Discords, and overcome Enmity by Courtesy and Discretion.

UPON the whole then, it appears that the Rules of this Society have a
direct

direct Tendency to render Conversation engaging, as well as innocent; and so to influence our Practice, as to be useful to others, and profitable to ourselves: For to continue in Amity, and maintain a fair Correspondence; to be disposed reciprocally to all Offices of Humanity, and to act upon mutual Terms of Benevolence, which are the Characteristicks of Christianity itself, are likewise the Cement of this Society. And how good it is to assist, comfort, and relieve the Distressed, I need not observe; nor is it less obvious, how pleasant it is to contribute to the innocent Delight, and promote the lawful Advantage of one another; and always to converse with Security, without Suspicion, on either Hand, of any fraudulent, injurious, or malicious Practices.

THUS have I done with my Subject.---What now remains, is, to mention

tion some few Things which concern only the Members of this Society.

WE are here so many Brethren met together to rejoice, and to do Good : ---To rejoice in the Acknowledgment of Divine Mercies, and in the Enjoyment of Society one with another : To do Good by increasing, and cementing our Friendship and mutual Correspondence ; and to enjoy the Good of our Labours.

THIS is a Practice allowed of both by Jews and Christians. The former were appointed to meet three Times a Year at *Jerusalem*, to feast and rejoice before the LORD ; and the latter, for near two Centuries after our Saviour, had their Feasts, wherein they met, both Rich and Poor, to enjoy, and make merry one with another.

IT is true, Men were at length obliged to leave them off, on account of the
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the Luxury and Excess which they occasioned.

BUT this is only a Reflection upon the Abuse of a Thing, which otherwise is innocent and commendable. For a laudable Institution may be perverted to ill Purposes.

HOWEVER, this Consideration shou'd make us cautious in our Behaviour, lest we fall under the same Inconveniences. Therefore, we are not to exceed those Bounds which our Constitution prescribes; but to avoid all Excess both as to our Pleasure, and Time; and to use the Blessings of Heaven soberly and temperately, so as neither to give Offence to any one, nor *make Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.*

LET us then, for the Honour of the Christian Religion, and the Credit of our own Society, *take Heed to our*
 D *Ways,*

Ways, that our Light may so shine before Men, that they may see our good Works, and glorify our Father, which is in Heaven: That so we may eat our Bread with Joy, and drink our Wine with a merry Heart; for GOD now accepteth our Work.

NOW to GOD, &c.

F I N I S.



